

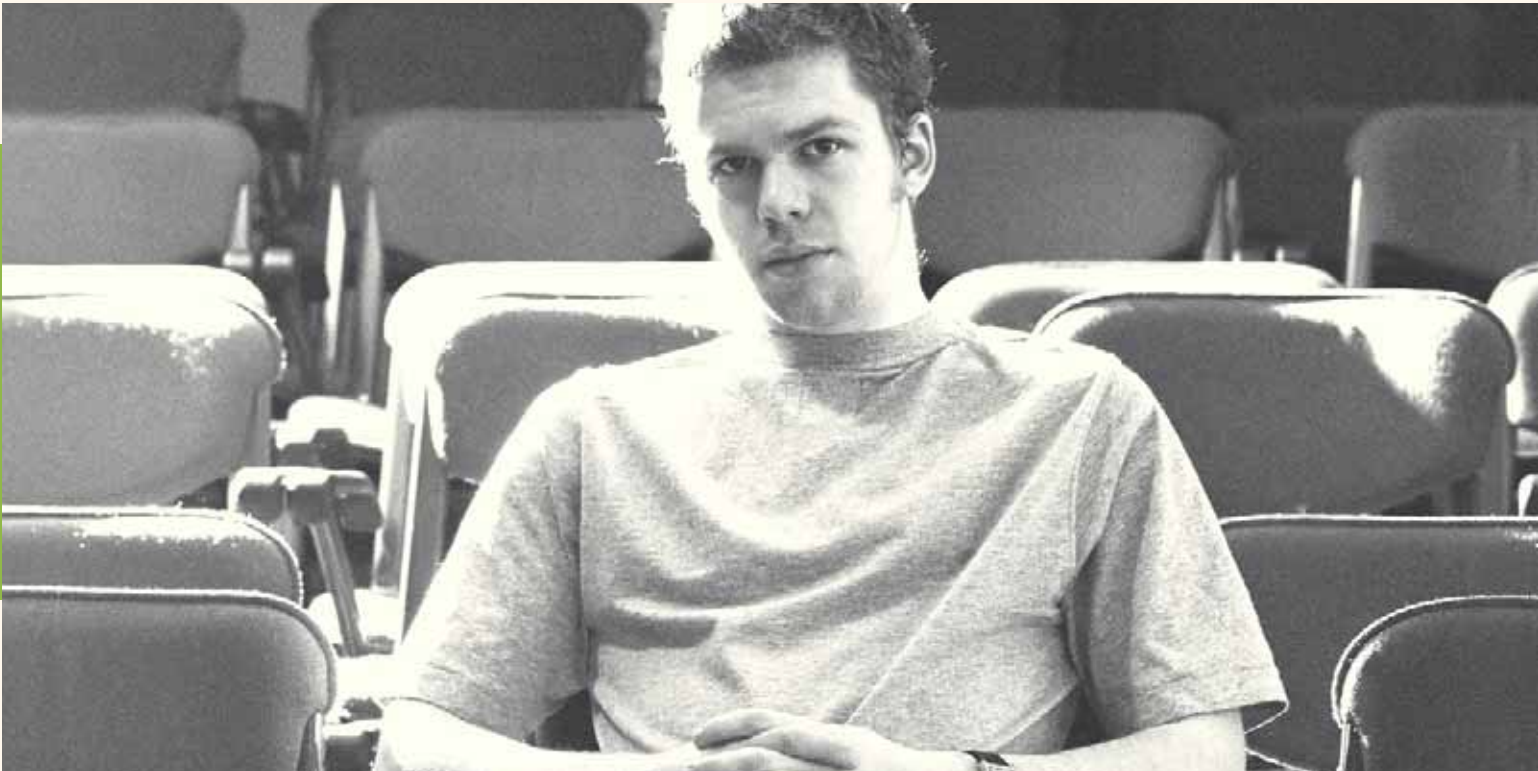
SOLVING *the* PUZZLE *of underage drinking*

A Compilation of “Best Practices” from the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control



the *significance* of the problem

The concern surrounding underage drinking is widely shared; the unnecessary negative consequences speak volumes to the importance of addressing this issue.



THE USE OF ALCOHOL BY YOUNG PEOPLE under the age of 21 has been an issue of importance to community leaders—law enforcement personnel, educators, elected officials, retailers, parents and others—throughout the nation for years. “Underage drinking”

has existed as a concern whether the legal age is 21, as it is now, or 18, as it was in many states for years. Some people may feel that drinking alcohol, including underage drinking, is a normal rite of passage into adulthood. However, there is no doubt that underage access to and use of alcohol has been a serious public health problem for the past several decades.

All states have laws regarding the sale, purchase, possession and/or consumption of alcohol among individuals under the age of 21. Strategies focusing on restricting underage use of alcohol will ultimately reduce the burden of underage drinking and related problems. Since young people have found new, creative ways to obtain alcohol, local communities and enforcement agencies would be well served to implement vigorous initiatives and campaigns to address prevention of underage possession and consumption of alcohol.

The history and extent of alcohol use by youth is well documented. While it is not the case that “everyone is using alcohol,” as some young people

believe, a majority of high school seniors (70 percent) report using alcohol in the past year, and nearly half (48 percent) report its use in the past 30 days.¹ For eighth-grade youth, these rates are 37 percent (annual use) and 20 percent (monthly use). While these rates are down slightly from their levels over a decade ago (with most of the reduction occurring in the last half-decade), a significant number of young people continue to use alcohol, even at early ages.

Potentially of greater concern is the number of young people who report higher-risk drinking behaviors: 30 percent of high school seniors report having been drunk during the past 30 days, and 48 percent report this during the past year. These rates have not changed significantly in the past decade. Self-reports of five or more drinks in a row at least once in the last two weeks was cited by 28 percent of high school seniors, again a fairly consistent rate for this age group over the past decade.

Similar patterns are found with college students and young adults,² another often-overlooked underage audience. While 30-day use among college students is 66 percent (down from 82 percent 20 years ago and 75 percent in 1991) and annual use is 82 percent (down from 91 percent in 1980 and 88 percent in 1991), heavy use (five or more drinks in a row at least once in the last two weeks) hovers around 40 percent (39 percent in 2003).

Alcohol-use patterns for those not in college, but of a similar age, are approximately the same as those for college students.

Also well substantiated are the negative consequences associated with youthful alcohol use—particularly excessive use.³ Alcohol is the drug most commonly used by youth and is the major contributor to injury, death and criminal behavior among young people. From 1979 to 2003, national data indicated little change in the frequency of alcohol's involvement in negative consequences on college campuses⁴—alcohol was cited as a factor in physical injuries (39 percent), violent behavior (61 percent), property damage (53 percent), lack of academic success (33 percent), student attrition (27 percent) and acquaintance rape (70 percent). Modest reductions in these rates were reported in 2003, but alcohol remains significantly involved with a wide range of undesirable behaviors.

The persistent correlation between these behaviors and underage drinking—for both the high school and college age groups—demands a broad, multilayered response to the problem. A recent report by the National Academy of Sciences describes characteristics associated with underage drinking, identifies consequences related to this behavior, and provides a context that helps define motives for youthful drinking.⁵ A primary focus of the report's findings is that a national strategy is

essential to addressing underage drinking, including a range of components such as media campaigns, regulation of marketing and entertainment efforts, enforcement, education and community mobilization. It calls for commitment and leadership at the national, state and local levels.

With decades of attention on reducing underage drinking and its negative consequences, it might be assumed that significant progress has been achieved. In spite of numerous efforts, however, major results have been elusive and much remains to be achieved.

The concern surrounding underage drinking is widely shared; the unnecessary negative consequences speak volumes to the importance of addressing this issue. Many, if not most, of these consequences are preventable. More constituencies need to be “brought to the table” for dialog, understanding, commitment, planning and action.

Five initial components are central in building a foundation for reducing underage drinking and associated negative consequences:

- A comprehensive, systemwide approach is essential for achieving favorable results, including policy, enforcement, programs, education and training. It is important to acknowledge that single, one-shot, “magic bullet” approaches will not be sufficient.

It is important to acknowledge that significant differences exist between age groups and that appropriate strategies for implementation will also differ as a result.

- Any effort should be based on local needs and issues and be carefully planned.
- Communication is central to the success of an initiative; this is important in the planning efforts, the implementation activities and the awareness about the results achieved.
- It is important to acknowledge that significant differences exist between age groups and that appropriate strategies for implementation will also differ as a result. At an overall level, the 18–20 year old age group has many different needs and issues when compared to the under 18 age group, and strategies and messages must necessarily be different.
- Attending to a range of issues associated with underage drinking must be part of the plan, including both “supply” and “demand” considerations. Not only is it important to reduce access to alcohol for underage youth, but it is also important to provide attention to the reasons young people use and abuse alcohol. This helps expand the focus to finding alternative and complementary strategies for addressing these needs and issues.



This booklet builds upon these foundations and serves as a stimulus for local action. It is designed to provide impetus for local communities and states to plan and implement strategies to address underage drinking. This booklet does not provide an overall “how to” for addressing underage drinking issues, but it does provide insights about the more appropriate and helpful strategies used locally and in state and national venues. This booklet does not claim to be comprehensive, but it does survey strategies that are worthy of consideration by localities as they work to address underage drinking. This booklet serves as a guide, providing information, resources, and hopefully motivation for community coalitions, organizations, law enforcement agencies, retail establishments, licensees, campus officials and concerned individuals as they strive to implement “best practice” techniques.

This booklet focuses upon solutions, strategies and options. While no “magic answers” or “quick fixes” exist, strategies found helpful in some states or communities are included. While not exhaustive by any means, these strategies illustrate the types of efforts that community leaders can undertake as they move forward toward the implementation of a comprehensive local strategy. The challenges are clearly present for making change; however, the opportunity is one that is shared by communities, organizations and their leaders.

NOTES

1. Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., Bachman, J.G., & Schulenberg, J.E. (2004). *Monitoring the future: National survey results on drug use, 1975-2003. Vol. 1: Secondary school students* (NIH publication no. 04-5507). Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 545 pp.
2. Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., Bachman, J.G., & Schulenberg, J.E. (2004). *Monitoring the future: national survey results on drug use, 1975-2003. Vol. 2: College students and adults ages 19-45* (NIH publication no. 04-5508). Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 267 pp.
3. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. (2002). 10th special report to the U.S. Congress on alcohol and health. Rockville, MD: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.
4. Anderson, D.S., & Gadaletto, A.F. (2003). *The college alcohol survey: The national longitudinal survey on alcohol, tobacco, other drug and violence issues at institutions of higher education, 1979-2003*. George Mason University, VA.
5. Bonnie, R.J., & O'Connell, M.E., eds. (2004). *Reducing underage drinking: A collective responsibility*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 317 pp.



approaches to a *solution*

This compilation of “Best Practices” provides interested parties with a foundation for developing and implementing programs that target underage access to alcoholic beverages. The guiding vision of this booklet is to:

- Reduce access of alcohol to individuals under the age of 21
- Provide consistent and effective enforcement strategies
- Promote positive values through the use of educational programs



putting *together* all the pieces

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Licensees

One of the most important groups to address alcohol with youth are the licensees, those who sell alcoholic beverages for use on-site (or “on-premises licensees” such as restaurants, bars or taverns) as well as off-site (or “off-premises licensees” such as grocery stores, convenience stores or package stores). Responsibilities among the owners and managers of these businesses include establishing policies for their establishments, training employees and follow-through to ensure compliance, reporting, public education and community awareness. As community members (and often as community leaders), licensees have responsibilities to address alcohol abuse at the source where alcohol is sold or served. Further, they have the opportunity to promote a healthy message of responsibility and public awareness through marketing in a responsible manner, promoting positive health and safety messages, and providing strategies for heightened vigilance in their communities. Often working hand-in-hand with state agencies, these local and regional stores have a major obligation in making a difference with their multiple audiences.

LICENSEE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Sellers and servers of alcohol can attend training programs as a good way to reinforce their efforts to prevent underage drinking and enforce state ABC laws. The programs are usually three hours in duration and include topics such as state and local laws, effects of alcohol on the body, intoxication, intervention techniques, underage drinking and recognizing fake identifications.

Examples: Responsible Sellers and Servers: Virginia's Program (RSVP), www.abc.virginia.gov
Alabama Responsible Vendor Program, www.abcboard.state.al.us
California's LEAD Program, www.abc.ca.gov

MANAGER TRAINING FOR RETAIL OUTLETS

Training programs are available for wait staff, managers and owners who remain critical in efforts to eliminate the adult provider of alcohol. If a licensee establishes policies that clearly indicate violations will not be tolerated and that the staff is expected to prevent violations, then an establishment will consistently exhibit behavior that is lawful. This sends an important message to the public.

Examples: Virginia's Managers of Alcohol Retailing Training (MART), www.abc.virginia.gov
Pennsylvania's Responsible Alcohol Management Program (RAMP), www.lcb.state.pa.us/edu

Regulators

Typically at the state level, regulators work with local stores and merchants to enforce the laws and ordinances addressing underage drinking and related behaviors. Policies and standards without enforcement are hollow; regulators provide oversight to ensure that follow-through occurs. Also, regulators may provide helpful frameworks for the work of individuals at the local level, such as forms for accountability and reporting and training resources and guidance.

COPS IN SHOPS

The Century Council's *Cops in Shops*® program brings law enforcement officials and retailers together in the fight against underage purchase of alcohol. Plainclothes police officers pose as employees in retail outlets to foil underage purchasers and adults who attempt to buy alcohol for youths. If caught, offenders find themselves talking to a police officer about going to court, paying fines, losing their driver's license and maybe going to jail. Police departments in over half of the states around the country have implemented this program. www.centurycouncil.org

IMPLEMENT AND ENFORCE ZERO-TOLERANCE LAWS

All states have enacted zero-tolerance laws for alcohol consumption for individuals under the age of 21; however, combining the law with administrative license revocation provisions allow for better adherence results.

Example: Oklahoma's "Under the Age of 21," www.under21.org

SHOULDER TAP

This enforcement campaign involves an underage buyer who is employed by the law enforcement agency and works under the direct supervision of law enforcement officers. The young employee randomly solicits adults outside stores that sell alcohol (including ABC stores) to buy alcohol for him or her. Many states perform this type of enforcement.

TARGET RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALCOHOL CONNECTED EMERGENCIES (TRACE)

This program was designed in California to investigate alcohol-related incidents involving underage drinkers and to identify the source of the alcohol. Investigating police officers immediately identify where the youths obtained or consumed alcohol prior to the event and notify ABC if the alcohol was purchased at an ABC licensed establishment. www.abc.ca.gov

UNDERAGE BUYER PROGRAMS

Underage Buyer (UB) operatives attempt to purchase alcohol at grocery and convenience stores, restaurants and other businesses. The operatives are instructed not to alter their appearance or mannerisms, or mislead clerks in any way while attempting to make a purchase. Operatives carry their own valid identification. If the store clerk asks for identification, the UB presents his or her valid ID card. If the clerk asks for the operative's age, the UB states his or her age in a clear, audible voice. Regardless of whether the sale is made, the operative leaves the store immediately after the attempt.

Examples: Texas' Minor Sting Operation, www.tabc.state.tx.us
Virginia's Underage Buyer, www.abc.virginia.gov

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Parents and Families

The families of young people play a vitally important role in preventing underage drinking and alcohol abuse. Parents are highly influential in the decisions made by their children—whether setting an example and serving as role models or addressing difficult issues in conversation with their sons and daughters at various ages. Numerous resources exist to help parents work with their children in sharing the facts, offering their insights, and setting standards for behavior. Beyond this, it is important that parents engage in their parental role during many age periods and developmental phases faced by their children. Dealing with alcohol issues is more than an area of emphasis just for teens or preteens; this is also important among youth at earlier ages, as well as with those entering young adulthood in the 18–20 age range. In a similar way, older siblings and relatives can be helpful in promoting positive decisions and healthy standards.



Ask, Listen, Learn: Kids and Alcohol Don't Mix is a highly creative multimedia program developed by The Century Council and Nickelodeon that tackles, head on, the difficulties of convincing teens not to try alcohol during their middle school years. www.nick.com/ads/asklistenlearn

Best Night of My Life is a Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) campaign where all stores distribute parent and student information to promote safe graduation/prom celebrations. Tips for parents and students emphasize the importance of making safe transportation arrangements, and never riding with someone who is impaired. LCBO Social Responsibility distributes copies of the posters and tips for parents and students to all Ontario high schools. Materials are also displayed in all LCBO stores during that period and distributed to a wide array of community groups, health and social service agencies and police. www.lcbo.com

National Family Partnership is a parent network designed to lead and support our nation's families and communities to nurture the full potential of healthy, drug-free youth. www.nfp.org

Nebraska's *Safe Homes Project* is designed to assist parents and communities in preventing children from using alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, other drugs or violence in their homes or on their property. www.pride.org/safehomes/index.html

Talk to Your Kids About Alcohol is a new educational initiative developed in partnership with MADD Canada for parents of preteens. The interactive, Web-based micro site encourages parents to talk with their preteens about alcohol by providing tips on talking with kids, teachable moments, myths and facts about alcohol, and links to useful Web sites. www.talktokidsaboutalcohol.ca



Communities

Communities play an important role in addressing underage drinking. Of course, all components cited in this booklet (licensees, regulators, educators, parents) belong to communities, but more broadly communities encompass both formal and informal groups and individuals. Communities can address underage drinking from direct as well as indirect perspectives; they may address underage drinking directly with campaigns or resources regarding alcohol and related issues, and they may also engage youth and other community members in activities that provide viable alternatives for youth, thereby reducing their desire for using alcohol. A range of community efforts not identified elsewhere in this booklet include policy support, public awareness initiatives, seed funding, public proclamations, Web sites, print materials, and proactive activities.

Important within community activities is having a sense of organization and an overall plan for addressing underage drinking. Strategic planning

is not a simple task, and is one that requires a range of community leaders (including volunteers and youth) coming together to develop reasonable short-term and long-term efforts to address underage drinking. Significant within this issue is to make the efforts to address underage drinking a priority within the community. The use of resources, including planning resources and personnel, can be helpful in developing, implementing and monitoring the implementation of the community's action plan.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America's (CADCA) mission is to build and strengthen the capacity of community coalitions to create safe, healthy and drug-free communities. The organization supports its members with technical assistance and training, public policy, media strategies and marketing programs, conferences and special events.
<http://cadca.org>

Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free, a unique coalition of Governor's spouses, federal agencies, and public and private organizations, is an initiative to prevent the use of alcohol by children ages 9 to 15. www.alcoholfreechildren.org

Communities may also engage youth and other community members in activities that provide viable alternatives for youth, thereby reducing their desire for using alcohol.

Education

Traditional educational settings provide an excellent context for addressing alcohol use and abuse and associated consequences. As community members and from a perspective grounded in research and science, educational leaders are obliged to partner in efforts to prevent underage drinking. Like community settings, educational settings permit a wide range of strategies for addressing underage drinking. These may include standard curricula, applied discussions in the classroom, extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, policy and enforcement efforts, support services, training and public-awareness activities. Leadership can be focused within the educational setting itself (whether at middle- or high-school level or college level) or within complementary agencies and groups (e.g., school boards, educational policy groups or state and local agencies). Further, educational agencies, by their very mission and nature, can be most influential in shaping the environment and culture both within the setting and in the larger communities they serve. A helpful starting point for educational groups is active involvement with the local community, including collaborative task forces and co-sponsored initiatives. Through this type of interaction, the theme of “shared responsibility” can be exemplified.

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Alcohol Facts for Students—Making Smart Choices is a teacher information/reference package that contains a series of fact sheets on Canada's Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) social responsibility programs. Also included is factual information about alcohol and its effects and a variety of other informational resources and services to help youth. The package has been distributed to all Ontario high schools and proactively through local store managers' outreach to schools before upcoming key dates for dances and other social events. www.lcbo.com

Texas' Alcoholic Beverage Commission has a statewide alcohol education program, *Project SAVE (Stop Alcohol Violation Early)*, that targets students in elementary, middle and high school. This program not only teaches young Texans to avoid alcohol use because it is illegal, but also equips them with skills necessary to resist peer pressure. A program description can be found at www.tabc.state.tx.us



COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES

College can and should be an enriching experience for all students and their parents. Although the majority of college students avoid using or misusing alcohol, many others do and can cause serious consequences to their peers. In an effort to respond to this growing concern, colleges and universities should implement policies and programs to combat the issues of underage drinking and social hosting for adult providers of alcohol.

Pennsylvania State University's alcohol-free *LateNight PennState* program is an alternative activity program offering students multiple forms of free entertainment as a means of curbing high-risk drinking. www.latenight.psu.edu

Utah State University has a coordinated prevention program and judicial process, *Judicial System Model*, for students who violate the student code related to alcohol and other drugs. www.usu.edu/swc/jsm.html

The University of Minnesota's *Alcohol Epidemiology Program* conducts advanced research on effective community and policy interventions in order to reduce alcohol-related social and health problems. www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol

The *Sourcebook 2001* prepared by the *Promising Practices: Campus Alcohol Strategies* project identifies strategies deemed most effective in addressing alcohol issues on college campuses. Based on three national solicitation and review processes, the compilation in the resource book provides summary descriptions of strategies with awareness and information, peer education, technology, targeted groups, support services, and policies and enforcement. www.promprac.gmu.edu





Tools for Success

One major tool for successful campaigns against underage drinking is securing private and public funding. Virginia ABC applies for and has received grant funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration. In turn, Virginia ABC distributes these funds through community projects and minigrants, such as the *Community Coalition* and *Operation Undergrad*.

A second tool for success is the development and maintenance of community-coalition building. A strong coalition will encourage and nurture collaboration between community and key stakeholders in order to mobilize them into establishing policies and programs that will benefit the community.

A third tool for success is the use of a variety of media. Media initiatives can include public service announcements, brochures, commercials, billboards, printed publications and established educational campaigns. A creatively designed media package can allow a serious message to come across in a simple, fun and exciting way to all ages.

Virginia's *None for the Road* and *Project Sticker Shock* campaigns, www.abc.virginia.gov

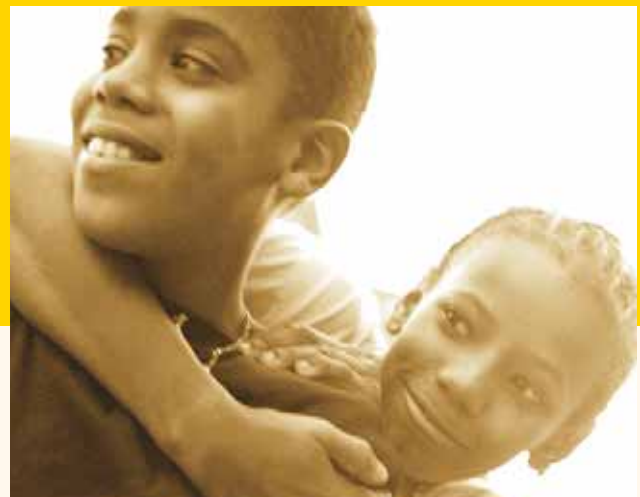
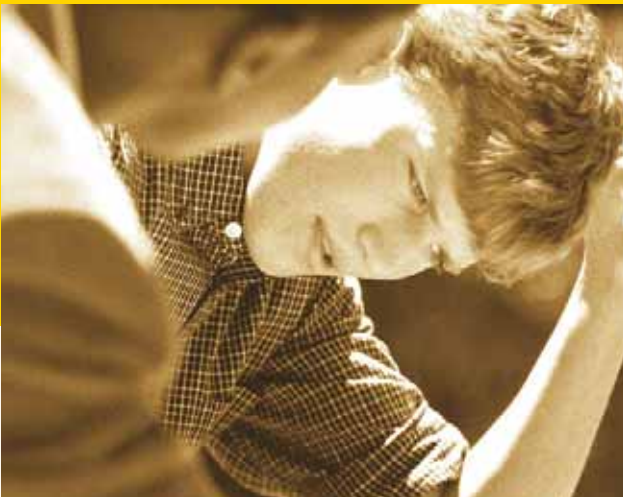
Pennsylvania's *Safety Bug*, www.padui.org

Ohio's *Parents Who Host Lose the Most*, www.ohioparents.org

Kansas' and Missouri's *You Can't Afford the Buzz*,
www.alcoholsafetynetwork.org

solving the puzzle collaboratively

Community coalitions encourage and nurture collaboration between the community and key stakeholders in order to mobilize them into establishing policies and programs that will benefit the entire community. These policies and programs will improve the social, cultural, economic and legal environments in which youth make alcohol choices, reducing the rate of high-risk and underage drinking among underage youth.



Developed by the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC). If you have any questions about the information in this booklet, please contact Education at Virginia ABC, (804) 213-4688 or education@abc.virginia.gov.

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Virginia ABC is a proud member of the National Alcohol Beverage Control Association (NABCA).

